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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000619

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PCUL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: MFA INSTRUCTS EMBASSIES TO FUNNEL ALL CHARITY
COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE SAG

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (U) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs distributed a notice on March 24 to all diplomatic missions in the Kingdom forbidding direct communication with philanthropic organizations. Begin Translated Text:

The concerned agency in the Kingdom noticed that some embassies and consulates are directly contacting charity societies in the Kingdom to inquire about certain issues and discuss ways of cooperation with them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hopes that all diplomatic missions make sure that all correspondence with any charity society should be through the Foreign Ministry in order for the Ministry to take the necessary procedures and provide the required facilities.

End translated text.

[12](#). (C) COMMENT: This request is a prime example of the SAG's unwillingness to give non-governmental organizations the flexibility to operate without government oversight -- a long-standing complaint of Saudi human rights activists. Requiring even non-profit, philanthropic organizations to obtain permission from the government to meet with foreign government missions and their associated aid and partnership programs will further stunt the growth of Saudi civil society. This clamp down on the relative independence previously enjoyed by these organizations is a means to control not only their activities and funding sources, but also the contacts and networking of the foreign missions themselves. Although the SAG has made substantial progress with many of its reforms, there remains a clear reluctance to allow true freedom of association. END COMMENT.
OBERWETTER